


## Scientist



 Albertus Magnus monument in Cologne

Albertus's knowledge of physical science was considerable and for the age remarkably accurate. His industry in every department was great, and though we find in his system many gaps which are characteristic of scholastic philosophy, his protracted study of Aristotle gave him a great power of systematic thought and exposition. His scholarly legacy justifies his contemporaries' bestowing upon him the honourable surname *Doctor Universalis*. It must, however, be admitted that much of his knowledge was ill digested; it even appears that he regarded Plato and Speusippus as Stoics.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

In the centuries since his death, many stories arose about Albertus as an alchemist and magician. On the subject of alchemy and chemistry, he wrote treatises on *Alchemy*; *Metals and Materials*; the *Secrets of Chemistry*; the *Origin of Metals*; the *Origins of Compounds*, and a *Concordance* which is a collection of *Observations on the philosopher's stone*; and other alchemy-chemistry topics, collected under the name of *Theatrum Chemicum*.<sup>[2]</sup> He is credited with the discovery of the element arsenic<sup>[3]</sup> and experimented with photosensitive chemicals, including silver nitrate.<sup>[4][5]</sup> He did believe that stones had occult properties, as he related in his work *De mineralibus*. However, there is scant evidence that he personally performed alchemical experiments. Much of the modern confusion results from the fact that later works, particularly the alchemical work known as the *Secreta Alberti* or the *Experimenta Alberti*, were falsely attributed to Albertus by their authors in order to increase the prestige of the text through association.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

According to legend, Albertus Magnus is said to have discovered the philosopher's stone and passed it to his pupil Thomas Aquinas, shortly before his death. Magnus does not confirm he discovered the stone in his writings, but he did record that he witnessed the creation of gold by

"transmutation."<sup>[6]</sup> Given that Thomas Aquinas died six years before Albertus Magnus' death, this legend as stated is unlikely.

However, it is true that Albertus was deeply interested in astrology, as has been articulated by scholars such as Paola Zambelli.<sup>[7]</sup> While today we would view this as evidence of superstition, in the high Middle Ages—and well into the early modern period—few intellectuals, if any, questioned the basic assumptions of astrology: humans live within a web of celestial influences that affect our bodies, and thereby motivate us to behave in certain ways. Within this worldview, it was logical to believe that astrology could be used to predict the probable future of a human being. Albertus made this a central component of his philosophical system, arguing that an understanding of the celestial influences affecting us could help us to live our lives more in accord with Christian precepts. The most comprehensive statement of his astrological beliefs is to be found in a work he authored around 1260, now known as the *Speculum astronomiae*. However, details of these beliefs can be found in almost everything he wrote, from his early *Summa de bono* to his last work, the *Summa theologiae*.